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CIA covertly recruited prospects in a March 1977 visit to campus

By JIM SCHACHTER

On Monday, March 23, 1977, a recruiter from the Central Intelligence Agency's Foreign Broadcast Information Center (FBIS) visited Columbia University.

The recruiter, a former Columbia student, met with two Columbia department chairmen to discuss the prospects of finding students qualified to become CIA foreign language specialists. Such talent, he was told, was "sparse," but one professor provided the names of three possible recruits and the other promised "to be on the lookout for qualified persons."

The recruiter's visit is described in an internal CIA memorandum, one of thousands recently released to Spectator under terms of the federal Freedom of Information Act. While no similar recruitment efforts are described in the documents, this meeting represents a pattern in the CIA's relationships with Columbia faculty members over more than thirty years.

The recruiter had studied with one of the department chairmen during his years at Columbia. They shared a professional interest—Eastern language studies, according to the FBIS documents. The CIA employee and the Columbia professors were working in separate, but overlapping, spheres: they knew each other and could help each other.

That common ground has been the foundation of contacts between faculty members and the CIA since as long ago as 1950, the CIA documents show. And while relationships between the Agency and faculty members may not be as formal as they were in earlier years, they continue until today.

CIA Director Adm. Stansfield

Turner, in fact, will not even promise that the Agency has ended all covert contractual arrangements with Columbia faculty members. Congressional investigators, meanwhile, have found that such relationships existed, in 1976, on over one hundred American college campuses.

Who are the Columbia faculty members that maintain contacts with the CIA? The names of some of them appear in the papers released to Spectator. Other names have been blacked out by the CIA to protect the identities of those who, according to the CIA lawyers, have "strictly academic-based and non-covert" relationships with the Agency "which must remain confidential."

The names of the department chairmen involved in the March 1977 meeting, for instance, have been withheld by the CIA. One is identified as "Dr. (14-space deletion) chairman of the Department of (22-space deletion) at Columbia University." The other is called "Prof. (14-space deletion) who is chairman of the (25-space deletion) department at Columbia and on the staff of (24-space deletion) and the (27-space deletion)."

Comparing the length of the deleted phrases with the 1977 roster of department chairmen, it appears that the first reference is to Herschel Webb, chairman of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. The second seems to refer to James Morley, chairman of the Department of Political Science and a staff member in 1977 at the Southern Asian Institute.

Neither Webb or Morley denied participating in discussions with a CIA recruiter, but neither recalled the March 1977 meeting.

"I don't see any reason why anybody in March 1977 would have come to me with questions of that sort," Webb said in an interview, "because I wasn't chairman of the department at the time."

According to the office of the

Dean of Graduate Faculties, Webb became chairman on April 1.

"I suppose I've known quite a number of people who've worked for the CIA," Webb said. "I can't categorically state in the hundreds and hundreds of people I've talked to since I became department chairman that there wasn't one who said he might be involved in recruiting for the government," he added.

Morley said that he "can't recall anything about" a 1977 meeting and "can't think of a student of mine who is recruiting." But Morley, like Webb, a Japan specialist, said he too knew several employees of the intelligence agency.

Both Webb and Morley said they never gave students' names to the CIA unless a student asked for help getting a job with the Agency. The Agency has acknowledged contracting with college professors to identify potential recruits without informing students that the CIA was considering employing them.

The University Senate resolved in 1978 that faculty involvement in such covert recruiting was "in no case" permissible.

It is not clear what happened to the three students' names given to the recruiter by one of the professors. The recruiter's report states that these names, and others, had earlier been given to a "John Fitzgerald" by the School of International Affairs' "placement officer."

In 1977, Eric Kocher, now a career counselor, was the assistant dean of SIA responsible for job placement. Kocher did not recall such a list, but noted he had repeated public contacts with James Fitzgerald, director of the CIA's local personnel office.

Kocher said he remembered an occasion similar to that described in the documents. "There was a supervisor or someone superior to Fitzgerald, probably a supervisor, I guess from Washington, who came to Columbia . . . to try to find just what the possibilities for students with language abilities might be." Such visits, Kocher said, "didn't happen very often."

James Fitzgerald said he does not "remember Eric Kocher ever giving me any list of names. Visits from alumni like the March 1977 trip occur, he said, "on occasion," though usually without his office's knowledge.

The 1977 episode, according to President McGill, "does sound like a traditional CIA recruiting practice." He termed "suspect" the two chairmen's meetings with the Agency representative.

"What is objectionable about that is an approach to a member of the faculty on a clandestine or confidential basis, while they are contemporaneously recruiting out of the open," McGill said.

But the President refused to commit himself to investigating the episode. "More substantial evidence" and an "egregious act . . . that seems to violate the canons of conduct of a faculty member" would be prerequisite for university action on such matter, he said.

Like Webb and Morley, several Columbia political scientists maintain academic-based relationships with the CIA. Assistant Professor of Government Thomas Bernstein, Associate Professor of Government Andrew Nathan, and Sewyn Bialer, acting director of the Research Institute on International Change, obtain documents from the Agency for use in class and research.

Nathan once sought CIA analysts' comments on an academic paper. Bernstein said he "knew some people in the analyses section of the agency and find(s) them very useful" in his research.

Nathan, Bernstein and Bialer insisted they never receive classified material from the Agency. The documents they obtain from the CIA's Coordinator for Academic Relations and Office of Economic Research, they said, are generally not available elsewhere. Most involve statistics on Soviet and Chinese economics and politics.

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